

Winter made a comeback in the Shortgrass Country. On a recent Saturday morning, the pickup windshields had frost on them at Mertzon. For a few nights, temperatures ran in the high 40s. Hombres who had prematurely traded their jackets for cold six packs were found to be very uncomfortable indeed, and once again the ant and the grasshopper tale was for real.

A small bird called a scissortail flycatcher is most reliable sign of spring. When the scissortail come and the mesquites leaf out winter is usually over.

Shortgrassers, as I suspect folks are everywhere, grow impatient for winter to end. Two or three warm afternoons will put the gardeners to setting out plants that struggle to live on the sunny side of a hothouse.

False signs lead them into planting before time. Things like high school kids going around in love clutches, or wild flowers budding, cause big profits for the vendors of plants and seeds.

I was thinking the other day that if Child Who Sits in the Sun and myself had kept a census on the girls our sons had brought home from school, we'd have a file on young females that make the most active chapter in the woman's liberation movement look like they were treading water.

Before I stopped the habit, we had some fillies at the ranch that had gone through 17 complete name changes. I'd be telling a boy to catch "Cindy". By the time he had her bridled, one of his brothers would show up and demand that Cindy be called "Bertha Ann" or "Kathy Sue".

To stay up with all the Saturday night action, I'd have had to gone into a fast business like saddle or harness racing. Ranching was too slow to keep up with their affairs. So I ordered them to go back to using the same names of the month and dependable labels like Prairie Dog or Buttermilk.

Shortgrass weather has a well established reputation for being unpredictable. Lots of years, the first killing frost in November will last until the next October. Sometimes the seasons don't change at all. There'll be a little shuffling of the notes down at the bank and little else to mark the time of the year.

It's been the best spring we've had in years. Lambs and calves are 45 days ahead of normal. Nursing mothers are fat as dries and the hair and the wool is bright and healthy.

The frost didn't hurt much. The scissortails that are around act sort of uncertain. But I know it's over by the smell and the feel of the grand season of rebirth. The big march to recovery is on out here, We never had it any better.

